

**Teenagers' significant experiences in areas of arts:  
a study of the subjectively felt impact and some qualitative  
aspects of experiences involving productive arts activities.**

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## **ABSTRACT**

As a part of a larger project, this study focused primarily on Finland-Swedish ninth-graders' "productive" arts experiences (involving music-making, acting, writing, painting/drawing, dancing), as these had been reported when the pupils had been asked to write down descriptions of "strong" experiences in arts areas (music, dramatic art, literature etc.). Two main objectives were to study participants' subjectively felt "strength" of the experiences, and to examine qualitative characteristics of the experiences, with a particular attention directed to aspects related to self-esteem.

Pupils' reported productive experiences mostly represented the music area, and they were much less frequent than the reported "receptive" arts experiences (involving music listening, watching films/plays, reading, etc.). The productive experiences were, on the average, rated as remarkably strong, and clearly stronger than the receptive experiences. Regarding qualitative characteristics, they were quite often accompanied by such elements related to self-esteem, which indicated satisfaction with one's performances or creations, noting signs of progress, feeling proud or self-confident, receiving approval from others, and the like; such "ego-enhancing" elements occurred only rarely among receptive experiences. More tentative qualitative comparisons revealed no drastic differences between productive and receptive experiences regarding the occurrence of "therapeutic", "flow-related" and "strangeness" elements. Compared to the generally rather activity-focused productive experiences, the receptive experiences seemed to focus more often on the "art object" itself and its various characteristics, and, probably as a consequence of this, they also more often contained associative reactions, acquisition of various kinds of new knowledge or insights, and a wider spectrum of affective reactions.

Some subgroup differences were observed, related to arts areas, to situational factors (private vs. collective activities) and, most clearly, to gender. Data are also presented concerning pupils' artistic leisure activities, school-related productive experiences, and correlations between variables. The discussion of the educational implications of the results underlined, among other things, that productive arts experiences and activities should be encouraged through learner-centered approaches which, besides developing artistic skills, also consider the importance of learners' experiences.

## **1. BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE OF THE ARTICLE**

This article will report some results noted in the author's project regarding young people's "significant experiences" in different aesthetic areas, a project originally inspired by the increasing tendency especially in music psychology to study holistic experiences in naturally occurring situations. In these studies, researchers have mostly examined participants' free retrospective descriptions of experiences which have made some particular impact on them. As a few examples of both pioneering and more recent research could be mentioned Pennington's (1973) study of music peak experiences, Panzarella's (1977) study of peak experiences of music and visual art, Sloboda's (1990) study on musical childhood memories and Gabrielsson's large Swedish project regarding "strong experiences related to music" (Gabrielsson & Lindström Wik 2003; Gabrielsson 2008; 2011).

Three distinctive features of the current project were, firstly, that the participants were young people in their middle teens, secondly, that the experiences which the participants were to report could concern various areas of aesthetic experience (music, literature, nature, etc.), and thirdly, that the main focus was on rather recent experiences which were considered "strong" to some degree, but did not necessarily need to be of the uniquely strong, or "peak", type. In this report, these experiences will be denoted as "significant experiences".

The first reports from this project have focused on the specific areas of music (Ray 2004, esp. ch. 5; Finnäs 2006) and dramatic art (Finnäs 2009), and further reporting is planned regarding issues which imply a simultaneous study of several areas. The current contribution represents a step in this direction, and specifically addresses some questions regarding "productive" experiences, i.e., experiences involving overt performing or creative activities, such as music-making, painting, writing, etc. Attention was initially drawn to

these issues by certain findings noted for the music experiences, suggesting that the productive experiences (mostly playing or singing) were felt more strongly than "receptive" experiences involving only listening, and also often were accompanied by some kind of "ego-bolstering" reactions. It was thus of interest to study somewhat more closely productive experiences in all relevant experience areas, especially in order to find out if trends such as those just mentioned for music could be noted also more generally. Only the "arts areas" were considered, since experiences in the nature area can not be productive. Thus, this article has as its central aims to present some results regarding:

1. The number and proportion of the studied teenagers' significant productive experiences in different areas of arts.
2. The participants' subjectively rated strength of these productive experiences.
3. Some main qualitative characteristics of these productive experiences, with a particular focus on characteristics related to self-esteem.

In addition, some data are summarily presented also regarding, among other things, productive artistic leisure time activities, experiences related to school, and the relationships between certain variables. A comparative approach is generally attempted, with comparisons made between experience areas, genders and some situational conditions. Regarding qualitative aspects, close comparisons with receptive experiences were made for the characteristics related to self-esteem, and only more tentatively for other qualities.

## **2. SOME REFERENCES TO EARLIER THEORY AND RESEARCH**

Some earlier thinking and empirical findings will be summarized below, to provide a few reference points for the current study. The just-mentioned observations regarding the music area in the first report from this project will also be considered.

### **2.1 Frequency of productive experiences**

Generally, productive experiences are far less frequent than receptive ones. It is much more common to listen to music than to perform or create music, to read novels or poems than to write fiction or poetry, to watch film and theatre than to act before a camera or on the stage, etc. There may, however, be considerable differences between various arts areas. Regarding young people and the area of dramatic art, for example, it seems that acting is never reported as a popular hobby, or may even (Nilsson 1998, 79) explicitly be pointed out as a non-preferred one. In the music area, on the other hand, most studies show that considerable proportions of teenagers make music as a leisure activity (cf. international data reported by Alsaker & Flammer 1999, esp. 42-43).

Some earlier data exist regarding the extent to which experiences of the "strong" type have been productive. Many of the relevant studies are related to Gabrielsson's above-mentioned project, and show that the results may be quite dependent on participants' background characteristics. In Gabrielsson's total sample of mostly adult persons, about 19% of the reported strong experiences were productive, but higher percentages between 24 and 29 were noted for subgroups of younger participants and groups with large proportions of persons with musical skills (Gabrielsson 2008, 475; 2011, 397). Substantial proportions of productive strong music experiences (nearly or even more than 50%) have been found in some samples of adults mainly consisting of professional or amateur musicians (cf. the data for music teachers, rock enthusiasts and persons interested in folk music, reported by, respectively, Ray 2004, 173, 310; Lundahl & Sanner 1990; Grill 1991). In an investigation on Swedish gymnasium students not much older than the participants in this study, the frequency of productive experiences seems to have been very low (cf. Antonsson & Nilsson 1991, esp. the data for the 21 subjects interviewed, cf. p. 33). In Jansson's (2000, 18) study of strong music experiences dating back to childhood or adolescence, as well as in the current project concerning teenagers (Finnäs 2006, p. 323; Ray 2004, p. 137), somewhat more than one fifth of the participants' strong music experiences were of the productive kind. Among adult persons' strong experiences of visual art, Löfstedt (1999, 36) found that 19 per cent of the experiences had involved "purely productive" activities or "mixed" activities with both productive and receptive elements. Studying strong dance experiences in a sample including 70% amateur or professional dancers, Tchotoklieva (1999, 17) found that 57 per cent of the experiences involved one's own dancing rather than only looking at other dancers.

## 2.2 The value of productive experiences

The importance of productive arts experiences has frequently been pointed out, often with an emphasis on their capacity to encourage individual creativity and individual expression, and to enhance persons' confidence in their own artistic abilities. This is the case not least in educational literature. In comprehensive expositions concerning possible or desirable study activities in specific arts areas or in arts generally, creative and performing activities typically have a well-established place, although the stress laid upon productive vs. receptive activities have often varied over time and between different authorities (cf. models generally relevant for aesthetic education such as those proposed by Abbs 1987, 56 or Reimer 1970, esp. 158-164; for education in different arts areas cf., e.g., Hickman 2000, esp. ch. 1, Irwin & Chalmers 2007 and Taylor 1992, esp. 15-32, regarding visual art; Nielsen 2007, Swanwick 1981, esp. 45-46 and Swanwick & Taylor 1982, esp. 16-19, 136-137 regarding music; Moslet 2002, esp. sect. 4 and Whyte 2007 regarding mother tongue as a school subject; cf. also Dils 2007 and Schonmann 2007 concerning receptive aspects of the otherwise generally activity-oriented areas of dance and drama education).

Some authors represent quite categorical positions regarding the relative importance of productive and receptive arts experiences. Ralph A. Smith, for example, explicitly questions the rationale behind regarding the development of productive artistic activities as an important objective in public schools. On the whole, he maintains that "the prospects for developing [critical and appreciative skills] and aesthetic percipience in the young are greater than the prospects for developing creative or performing skills" (Smith 1989, 207). Smith does not notably consider the positive individual experiences potentially evoked also by amateur productive activities, but rather welcomes a cultural society where large numbers of people with well-developed appreciative capacities would be able to enjoy the creations and performances of considerably fewer but really proficient artists. Smith mainly represents visual art, but evidently also considers his ideas more generally relevant at least for music education (Smith 1989, esp. 207-209).

David J. Elliott, on the contrary, has become known for his great emphasis on productive rather than receptive activities in music education. According to his "praxial" approach, the most important aspect of the general music curriculum is "active, artistic, and authentic music making - through performing and improvising in particular . . ." (Elliott 1997, 21). Listening exercises have their place, of course, but primarily only if they are "embedded in efforts to develop musicianship through performing, improvising, composing, arranging and conducting" (Elliott 1995, 106). He especially criticizes Reimer's (1989) "aesthetic" approach to music education for focusing too much on mere listening activities (Elliott 1997, 20), and he regards the application of his praxial principles as necessary if music education is to reach what he sees as its ultimate goals, i.e., musical enjoyment and the development of aspects of the student's self: self-knowledge, self-growth and self-esteem (Elliott, e.g., 1997, 5-6).

Elliott sometimes (e.g. 1997, 6) makes references suggesting that the desired "musical enjoyment" of pupils would be closely comparable to the kind of peak or "optimal" experiences characterized by Csikzentmihalyi as states of "flow". This last-mentioned author could also more generally be cited for the way in which he draws attention to the importance of productive experiences, not least in various artistic areas. He occasionally mentions receptive behaviours as possibly giving rise to flow experiences (e.g. watching art works or being "engrossed in reading a good book or watching a great performance"); Csikzentmihalyi 1991, 106-108; 1993, 177), but practically all of his concrete examples of flow experiences represent productive activities, including creative or performing activities in aesthetic areas such as music, writing, visual art and dance (Csikzentmihalyi 1993, 176-179, 182-183). Many of the characteristics which Csikzentmihalyi mentions as essential for a flow experience evidently are relevant primarily for active-productive rather than receptive experiences (esp. feedback to one's actions, challenge-skill balance, sense of control/no worry of failure; e.g., Csikzentmihalyi 1997, 111-112). Talking of music experiences, he holds that music-making has a clearly greater potential to cause states of flow than has only passive, or even active, listening to music (Csikzentmihalyi 1991, 109-111).

## 2.3 Some empirical findings

Regarding empirical observations on the general impact of productive aesthetic experiences, the data mentioned above concerning the frequency of productive strong experiences should have some relevance. Somewhat similar results have been noted also when participants in the Swedish studies, regardless of which kind of strong experience they have chosen to report, have been asked whether they in general use to get their strongest experiences from productive or receptive activities. Only in the Tchotoklieva (1999, 18) study did an unequivocal majority of 57% (excluding some "both-and" cases) mostly get their strong experiences from productive activities (own dancing) rather than from receptive ones. But also the value of 40% noted by

Grill (1991, 60), and those noted by Gabrielsson for young and middle-aged participants and amateur musicians are relatively high (the proportions of participants usually getting strong experiences from productive or from either type of experience were about 35% for the last-mentioned groups, cf. Gabrielsson 2008, 475; 2011, 397). It should be evident, however, that the relative frequencies of productive strong experiences do not necessarily bear any simple relation to the subjectively felt impact of these. Although the productive music experiences also in this author's project were clearly fewer than the receptive ones, they received higher "strength ratings" (Finnäs 2006, 323).

Concerning qualitative aspects, references could be made to the many productive experiences related in detail by Csikzentmihalyi's subjects when told to describe extremely enjoyable experiences. The most typical characteristic of such flow states, also in arts areas, seems to be a high level of concentration or absorption, often accompanied by forgetting of time and place and perhaps one's own self, by an altered sense of self or a sense of "merging" with the current activity or its object, or by a feeling that the activity in question runs automatically without need for conscious control (Csikzentmihalyi 1993, 178-187; 1997, 111-112). Also participants' oral or written descriptions in the above-cited studies on strong experiences contain many similar reactions, which, of course, often may be equally relevant for both productive and receptive experiences (cf. frequently occurring expressions of the type "became totally absorbed" . . . "did not notice the passing of time", etc.).

In a few of the studies of strong experiences, all of them concerning music, productive experiences have been studied separately and sometimes explicitly compared with receptive ones. On the basis of questionnaire items, Gabrielsson & Lindström (2003, 199, 192) found, among other things, that "performers" (i.e., participants reporting experiences involving their own music performances) reported less frequency of tears than "listeners", but more often felt "a community among us all", felt "merging with something greater", and had a "spiritual" but non-religious experience. In his later publication summarizing his projects and presenting detailed reports of experiences, Gabrielsson (2008; 2011) dedicates two chapters (no. 18-19) to participants reporting performance experiences. Here the author, after presenting verbatim many descriptions of experiences containing flow-like enjoyment and absorption, strong emotional involvement, forgetting of time and place, feelings of transcendence etc., concludes that these reactions were quite similar to those often reported also in listening experiences, and that the most distinctive characteristics of the performers' experiences implied a focus on the performing activity *per se*, and on the relationship with one's fellow players and with the audience, "perhaps also with oneself"; among choir singers, the sense of being a valuable contributing part in producing an impressive choral sound was also important, as well as the social feeling of togetherness with other choir members (sect. 18.7 and 19.5 in Gabrielsson 2008; 2011).

Gabrielsson also separately presents strong experiences reported to have occurred during participants' teens, and notes how the productive experiences here typically had contained elements of happiness and pride after a successful performance, satisfaction with applause, stimulated self-esteem and motivation to continue to develop one's music interests (all these experiences involved performing in front of an audience; cf. Gabrielsson 2008, 87-92; 2011, 61-66). These results concur well with some of this author's earlier results regarding teenagers' significant music experiences, according to which at least about one half of the reports of productive experiences, mostly representing performing or singing on one's own or in public, contained clear examples of what was called "ego-bolstering" elements, which expressed satisfaction when noting one's own musical attainments or when receiving approval from listeners, and the like (Finnäs 2006, 325-326).

Also Lundahl & Sanner (1990, 54-56) single out some "themes" typical of strongly experienced own rock performances. Nearly half of their 20 interviewed participants enjoyed the forceful attack when playing, and the moments when their bands found a collective harmony. Several participants had felt the pleasure of making a contribution of their own to a successful performance, and a nearly related theme was perhaps the one entitled "egocick", involving feelings of being an important person on the stage, before an audience.

All the above-cited studies have represented the ex post facto type of research, and it is not clear whether experimental investigations can contribute much to the knowledge most relevant for understanding particularly strong aesthetic experiences in natural situations. In the music area it may be mentioned, however, that Finnäs (1989, 32-34) in a research review found certain evidence that "activity-oriented" music instruction (involving music-making, dancing) in some experimental or quasi-experimental studies had often affected school pupils' preference for the music (or type of music) in question somewhat more positively than less activity-oriented methods. In a later experiment by Unwin e.a. (2002) a singing group showed greater positive changes on a mood scale than a group which only listened to the songs, although the differences were not statistically significant.

## 2.4 Self-esteem

Taking into consideration some of the just-cited research results noted for teenagers, and as was stated in the introductory section, the principal qualitative characteristics focused on in this study were those representing or being nearly associated with self-esteem, chiefly by their connection with participants' reactions of satisfaction, joy or pride concerning their own attainments and abilities. Although self-esteem is probably the most generally used term, other more or less synonymous ones would be self-worth (Harter 1985), self-respect, self-regard and self-confidence (the positive aspect of self-esteem, according to the two-dimensional theory of self-esteem suggested by Owens 1993). The study of productive rather than receptive experiences also quite naturally brings into focus participants' sense of competence or, to use Bandura's (1982) term, self-efficacy, a factor that may be seen as an important contributor to self-esteem (Harter 1985).

Factors related to self-esteem are of a particular interest as it comes to young people's mental development and also from a general point of view. Self-esteem has traditionally been regarded as one of the most important features of a person's self-concept, and both as a "trait" variable and as an experimentally manipulated condition it has been shown to correlate positively with many indicators of mental health and well-being (Rosenberg 1985, esp. 209-213; Mann et al. 2004).

## 2.5 Conclusions relevant for the current study

Referring to the aims of the present study and considering firstly the general impact of experiences, one may note that the "strength ratings" given by the participants for their experiences will here, unlike in earlier studies, make it possible quantitatively to assess the impact of the reported experiences.

As to qualitative aspects, the reflections and research results above give several relevant suggestions, and regarding teenagers' productive experiences they definitely confirm that elements related to feelings of competency and self-esteem deserve special attention (cf. especially Gabrielsson's and this author's just-cited results regarding teenagers' reactions in experiences involving music performing; cf. also Lundahl & Sanner's "egokick"- and similar reactions). Assuming that productive arts experiences frequently have a flowlike nature, it could also be added that Csikzentmihalyi (1993, 194-195) found that states of flow often lead to stress reduction and to increased self-esteem as a consequence of the sense of accomplishment and success often connected with these states. On the theoretical side, Elliott also stressed the development of self-growth and self-esteem as important consequences of a music education based on productive activities (cf. p. 4 above).

If one wants to refer the qualitative features of productive arts experiences to some classification system, there is of course no single taxonomy which would be perfectly applicable to such experiences in all aesthetic areas. Based on several hundred persons' descriptions of experiences, Gabrielsson & Lindström developed a very detailed system for categorizing strong experiences related to music, a system which should probably have rather broad relevance and which has also been applied in areas of visual art and dance (cf. the above-cited Löfstedt and Tchotoklieva studies). Taking aspects of self-esteem as an example, in Gabrielsson's and Lindström's categorization scheme these would most evidently belong to the class "Increased self-esteem" in the subcategory "Confirmation of identity, self-actualisation" within the main category "Personal and social aspects" (cf. Gabrielsson & Lindström 2003, 215, category no. 7.3; note that at least a class such as "Perfection, everything fits, pride, grandeur" in the subcategory no. 5.2 of "Positive emotions" could also be relevant; cf. p. 213; the categories of the scheme are also presented in app. A of Gabrielsson 2008; 2011). Another possible theoretical frame of reference, also regarding music and carrying special relevance for young people, could be found in the model of the psychological functions of music in adolescence, proposed by Saarikallio and based on an extensive research review (Laiho 2004; Saarikallio 2007). Her system comprises four main categories concerning emotional aspects (incl. mood states, dealing with stress, etc.), interpersonal relationships, identity (incl. formation of one's self) and agency. For the current study, qualities related to the agency category should be of particular relevance, as this concerns, among other things, feelings of mastery, competence and self-esteem.

### 3. METHOD

#### 3.1 Sample

The total sample was composed of pupils in the last (ninth) grade of the Finnish compulsory school. Data were collected at the end of the spring term or, for only 3 classes, of the autumn term. Practically all pupils had reached the age of 15 or (somewhat fewer:) 16. The collection of data was administrated in 1993-1999 by the author or his assistants in 50 classes in 13 schools, selected to represent various types of residential areas in the Swedish-speaking and bilingual regions in Western and Southern Finland. Three schools were located in the countryside, seven in small or medium-sized towns (8.000-55.000 inhabitants) and three in the capital Helsinki (600.000). The number of pupils present at the data collection sessions was 832.

Since this study considered only experiences in different areas of arts, all pupils reporting nature experiences and non-aesthetic experiences were eliminated from the analyses (regarding the elimination also of participants with "mixed" productive-receptive experiences, cf. below). Most pupils reported only one experience, and in the main analyses only one experience, i.e., the one with the highest "strength rating", was included also for those few participants who reported two or (very rarely) more experiences. Some observations regarding the 15 productive "second experiences" are summarized in section 4.3.1).

#### 3.2 Data collection procedure

Data were collected during class sessions (sometimes with two school classes combined), and some special measures were taken to explain to the participants what kind of experiences they were expected and not expected to report. Firstly, they were made to focus on relevant experience areas by a questionnaire distributed before the instructions proper, with items exemplifying a) receptive activities in aesthetic areas: reading fiction and poetry, watching films and plays, listening to music, watching music videos, attending concerts, being interested in visual art and visiting art exhibitions, and enjoying nature (always with 3-4 response alternatives indicating how often they engaged in such activities: every day-several times a week, etc.), and b) corresponding productive activities: writing prose and poetry, playing some instrument, singing, acting in amateur theatricals, drawing or painting, and dancing classical or modern dance (alternatives: yes-no, for engaging-not engaging in these activities). Secondly, in the oral instructions many different examples were then presented of how activities such as those in the questionnaire may often be accompanied by quite "strong" experiences (finding some visual object particularly beautiful, being captivated or moved by the story in a book or a film, enjoying one's own artistic activities, etc.). Thirdly, before being asked to write down strong experiences, the subjects were explicitly instructed to think of experiences such as those just mentioned, and to avoid reporting other ones, especially to avoid three other types of experiences that according to a pilot study without special instructions were very frequently reported as "strong" ones: those connected exclusively a) with love or friendship, b) with one's own or others' accidents, and c) with one's own or others' successes or failures in various activities; reporting such experiences were not "allowed" if they did not happen to contain elements related to some aesthetic area. Frustrating arts-related experiences were thus not excluded, but it may be noted that the examples given in the instructions (admiring art objects, being moved, etc.) directed participants' attention mainly to positive, engaging experiences.

After this, the pupils were told to write a short essay about at least one experience of the kind suggested. They were instructed to consider mainly experiences during the last two or three months, but to feel free to describe experiences in a more distant past if no recent ones seemed "strong" enough. They were asked to describe in detail each experience and its social-situational context, and also to rate its strength on a scale ranging from 4 to 10, with 4 indicating an only barely strong and 10 an overwhelmingly strong experience. All information was given anonymously.

Although the participants thus were to describe "strong" experiences and rate the "strength" of these, the term *significant experiences* has here been preferred in order to avoid unnecessary confusion with the strong experiences studied by the research cited above, i.e., experiences pretending to be of an exceptional "peak"- or "strongest ever had"-variety. Actually, the pupils' reports here covered the whole range from very deeply felt reactions to those apparently considered barely worth mentioning (occasionally indicated by some formulation such as "I do not know if this was any really strong experience, but . . .").

#### 3.3 Measurement of the main variables

The only important purely quantitative variable of the study was based on the just-mentioned *ratings of the strength of the experiences*. Ranging from 4 to 10 with also half and quarter points allowed, the ratings represent a practically continuous "quasi-interval" scale (Smith & Glass 1987, 95). Due to the general

strength of the experiences, the distributions of ratings were negatively skewed around high means, especially for the productive experiences (cf. the "Allprod" row in table 1).

The other main variables were all qualitative and thus based on nominal measurement, i.e., classification. A crucial categorization regarded the dichotomy of *productive* vs. *receptive experiences*. Here, some of the described experiences could not be classified unequivocally because they contained both productive and receptive aspects, as, e.g., when a productive activity such as painting had been inspired by a receptive activity such as admiring another painting or listening to some music. Since it was considered desirable to focus on "purely productive" experiences, the pupils with mixed productive-receptive experiences were eliminated from the main analyses (section 4.3.1 will summarize some findings for the 20 pupils with mixed art experiences, as well as for a few reports of "second experiences"). In selecting "purely receptive" experiences for comparison purposes, a somewhat similar complication specifically concerned the music area, where several pupils reported experiences from such pop- or rock concerts with well-known artists in some arena-like place, where large audiences of young people typically do not only listen receptively but also overtly join in with overt and sometimes more or less productive activities such as shouting, singing, hand-clapping, swaying and jumping. These cases were also left out of the analyses comparing productive experiences with receptive ones.

In classifying experiences into *different areas of the arts*, experiences involving musicals and similar kinds of music theatre were in this study referred to the area of dramatic art (mostly denoted by the shorthand term "drama"), together with experiences connected with theatrical plays and fictional films. The area of visual art typically concerned activities or reactions related to "artistic" painting or drawing. The literature area included experiences regarding fictional prose or poetry; referring to song lyrics did never place an experience in the literature category, because lyrics were always mentioned as an integral element of some music performed, created or listened to. Of the few dance experiences, 5 were of a more "artistic" kind, representing dance activities according to some choreographic principles and generally rehearsed for performances (jazz dance, square dance, classical ballet, etc.). However, the 4 experiences of disco or party dancing were also accepted in the dance area, since they evidently reflected reactions evoked by the activity itself rather than only by social or romantic aspects of the dancing situation (in a few analyses the 5 "performing" dancers will be kept apart from the disco/party dancers). Regarding the nature area, it was sometimes difficult to decide especially whether some of the numerous "springtime feelings" should be classified as nature experiences or as non-aesthetic ones (cf. Finnäs 2006, 320-321), but this did not affect the categorization of arts experiences.<sup>1</sup>

Although there were *a priori* reasons to draw particular attention to the special importance of aspects related to self-esteem, the general exploratory approach of the study implied, both regarding these aspects and more generally, that the final selection of qualitative characteristics describing pupils' *reported feelings and reactions* were, in fact, largely a part of the data analysis itself. Here, the descriptions of productive experiences were examined with special attention to the possibility of arriving at such experience aspects which 1) were related to factors which seem to be important primarily from a psychological or pedagogical point of view (cf. the above section summarizing earlier theory and research), 2) seemed to have some generalizability over different experience areas, and 3) were positively relevant for at least about 20 per cent of the participants.

It is important to note that the choice of qualitative aspects was based on elements which were positively present only in the subgroup of pupils reporting productive experiences, and thus resulted in a selection where qualities potentially underrepresented in such experiences received scant attention. The tentative comparisons made with receptive experiences will, however, give some important complementary information regarding significant characteristics which may be relatively lacking in productive experiences (cf. sect. 4.7).

### 3.4 Validity and reliability of measures

The pupils' numerical strength ratings regarding the experiences should evidently tell something about the felt impact and memorability of these experiences, but the ratings could not be tested in any simple way for validity or reliability. Occasional low ratings given for experiences described as quite intense, and vice versa, indicated that the reliability of these ratings was definitely not perfect (regarding similar inconsistencies also among adult subjects regarding music experiences, cf. Pennington 1973, 6-7). On the other hand, and as a retrospective comment, it is unlikely that certain very clear and statistically highly significant trends noted for these ratings could have been obtained for measures heavily contaminated with random error (cf. esp. the

<sup>1</sup> In the earlier study of music experiences (Finnäs 2006), the experiences were classified more strictly according to their described content. For example, a music video experience where the visually presented elements but not the music itself were described and commented upon, could be categorized as a drama experience rather than a music experience. In the current study, however, the kind of aesthetic area was, in the way described, the decisive criterion for classification.

results in table 1).

Regarding qualitative characteristics, pupils' descriptions of their experiences were generally sufficiently detailed to make the classifications into different arts areas and into purely productive vs. purely receptive experiences quite uncomplicated. The qualitative aspects of pupils' reactions which are presented in the "Results" section, as well as the type of relevant formulations chosen from the written reports, could probably in general claim to possess fairly high levels of face validity. Regarding flow aspects, the explicit consideration of Csikszentmihalyi's theories and findings should have contributed to the content validity of the indicators selected.

All qualitative categorizing was made by the author himself, and the main measures to compensate for the lack of inter-rater reliability estimates have been attempts to specify as clearly as possible both the classification principles and the selection of relevant content from pupils' reports (e.g., through varied and concrete exemplifications, focusing on carefully chosen key expressions), and to apply somewhat conservative criteria for accepting expressions as indicators of a particular quality. Regarding ego-enhancement, certain correlative and factor analytic data indicated some internal consistency for the components of this important aspect (cf. sect. 4.4).

A thorough examination of all pupils' experiences is planned only for a somewhat later phase of this project, and the comparisons on qualitative characteristics between productive and receptive experiences were thus largely based only on rather cursory perusals of the receptive experiences. Closer inspections of the receptive experiences were made only for "ego-enhancing" elements, i.e., those related to self-esteem; for some other aspects certain comparisons were based on counting a few simple key expressions (e.g. mentioning crying/tears, or some specified adjectives denoting certain feelings).

### **3.5 Statistical analysis**

In the main data analyses, i.e., those related to the issues 1-3 in the introductory section, parametric measures and methods such as arithmetic means and analysis of variance (ANOVA) were used when comparing groups on strength ratings. In quantitatively describing the occurrence of qualitative characteristics of the productive experiences, simple frequencies and per cent values were used, along with some cross-tabulations and correlational statistics in tentatively assessing interrelationships between variables. All significance tests were two-tailed, and although  $p \leq .05$  was considered a principal criterion for significance, p-levels up to ca. .10 were often also given attention, due to the exploratory character of the study and the heightened risks of accepting false null hypotheses when a sample is homogenous, its subgroups small, and the statistical tests sometimes not very sensitive.

## **4. RESULTS**

### **4.1 Frequency and general characteristics of productive experiences; strength ratings**

The most important information in table 1 concerns the arithmetic means for pupils' ratings of the strength of their productive or receptive experiences, and the numbers of pupils in each subgroup (which is identical with the number of experiences, since each participant was represented by only one experience, cf. p. 7 above). For completeness, some data are also presented regarding the total group reporting arts experiences (including cases of "mixed" activities and "activity-related" concert experiences; note that the "All"-columns also include a few participants lacking gender information). Generally, music, drama and nature experiences are rather frequently reported by both genders, and for the girls nature, literature and dance experiences are clearly more frequent than for the boys, who remarkably often have found no experience at all to report from any aesthetic area; the 138 boys in the "no aesthetic" category, largely representing less urbanized regions, amount to 38% of the total number of boys (for tables which consider also pupils' residence area, cf. Finnäs 2006; 2008). Regarding what could be seen as overlaps between areas, it may be especially noted that most nature experiences also contained visual elements, and that many music experiences were somewhat "literary" in the sense that the lyrics of a song had played some role.

In the music, drama and dance areas the productive activities generally consisted in performing, but 4 girls and 3 boys explicitly mentioned creative activities related to music-making (inventing lyrics or melodies, arranging, improvising), and one girl's drama experience involved improvised acting.

Although this report will not focus much on situational details, it may be mentioned that the main part of the pupils reporting productive experiences could be classified in two rather distinct categories depending on whether the social context of their experience was clearly one of privacy or of collectiveness, and, mostly as a

consequence of this, whether the environment was either a private or a public or institutional one. Private experiences when the pupils played, sang, painted/drew or wrote wholly alone and in their own home environment, were 20 (34%). Twenty-five experiences (43%) in the music, drama or dance areas related to coordinated or collaborative group activities, consisting of rehearsals or (mostly) of performances in front of an audience in some public place. The 13 pupils that did not fit into either category were those who, e.g., reported some individual activity (painting, writing) carried out during school lessons, rehearsing music with one single peer, or solo playing or dancing in front of a panel of adjudicators. The mentioned dichotomy will later sometimes be referred to as "private" vs. "group" or "collective" experiences. These categories had an evident connection with experience areas (all experiences in the drama area and no one in the areas of literature and visual art took place in a group activity context), but they were also related to subjects' gender. Nearly one half of the girls' experiences were private (14/32=44%), while a clear majority of boys' experiences were collective (15/24=62%); this was largely due to the gender differences in the music area, where only two girls reported group activities (singing in a choir), while of the 19 boys 13 (68%) described group activities which in most (11) cases consisted in playing in a rock band. A cross-tabulation of gender with the "private-intermediate-collective" continuum gives an almost significant Cramer's V of .31 ( $p=.06$ ).

In table 1 the number of pupils reporting a productive experience, 58, is relatively low, constituting 14% of the 403 pupils reporting arts experiences. Except for the somewhat special area of dance the productive experiences are clearly outnumbered by the receptive ones, with an especially striking disproportion between these two kinds of experiences in the literature and dramatic areas. The general proportion of pupils with productive experiences does not differ much between boys and girls (24/178=13% and 32/220=15%, respectively). The small subgroup sizes make conclusions about possible gender differences within specific areas difficult. In the music area 24% of the boys and 16% of girls report productive experiences (19/80 and 13/81), but in all other areas the number of productive experiences is greater among the girls.

The strength of the experiences was rated by most pupils (94% of those describing arts experiences). The means of the ratings given for the productive experiences are high and clearly exceed 8.00 for almost all subgroups, while only a few of the corresponding means for the receptive experiences approach such levels. Music is the only area where the mean strength for productive experiences (8.43) significantly exceeds the mean (7.79) for the receptive ones (in the gender x experience type ANOVA  $df=1/122$ ;  $F=5.454$ ;  $p=.02$ ). The many small group sizes make the interpretation of the results for the other five areas difficult. Regarding four of these there are, however, strikingly clear differences in favour of productive experiences, and if gen-

Table 1. Mean strength ratings and (in parentheses) group sizes for different subgroups. In the column showing differences between mean ratings for productive and receptive experiences, p indicates statistical significance levels lower than .20.

Area	Productive			Receptive			<i>Difference</i> $All_{prod}-All_{rec}$	Total <sub>arts</sub>			
	Boys	Girls	All <sub>prod</sub>	Boys	Girls	All <sub>rec</sub>		Boys	Girls	All	
Music	8.17(19)	8.79(13)	<b>8.43</b> (33)	7.71(46)	7.84(54)	<b>7.79</b> (101)	<b>.64</b> $p=.02$	7.92(80)	8.17(81)	8.05(163)	
Dramatic	8.50 (1)	9.00 (3)	<b>8.87</b> (4)	7.09(55)	8.07(58)	<b>7.57</b> (115)	<b>1.30</b> $p=.19$	7.12(56)	8.12(61)	7.63(119)	
Literature	(0)	8.33 (3)	<b>8.33</b> (3)	6.86(17)	7.54(41)	<b>7.33</b> (58)	<b>1.00</b>	6.86(17)	7.60(44)	7.39 (61)	
Visual	8.33 (3)	7.65 (5)	<b>7.91</b> (8)	6.37(12)	7.50 (4)	<b>6.60</b> (16)	<b>1.31</b> $p=.15$	6.87(16)	7.86 (10)	7.23 (26)	
Dance	8.50 (1)	8.50 (7)	<b>8.50</b> (9)	(0)	9.25 (1)	<b>9.25</b> (1)	<b>-.75</b>	8.50 (1)	8.59 (8)	8.50(10)	
Mixed, other	(0)	9.00 (1)	<b>9.00</b> (1)	7.06 (5)	8.00 (3)	<b>7.46</b> (8)	<b>1.54</b>	7.82 (8)	8.50 (16)	8.28 (24)	
<b>Total</b>	8.22(24)	8.53(32)	<b>8.40</b> (58)	7.20(135)	7.85(161)	<b>7.55</b> (299)	<b>.85</b> ; $p=.001$	7.46(178)	8.08(220)	7.80(403)	
								<b>Nature area</b>	7.44 (49)	7.95(94)	7.78(144)
								<b>No aesthetic</b>	7.34(138)	8.06(84)	7.60(228)

eral strength means were calculated for all the five "small" areas taken together, these means would differ even more clearly and significantly than those for the music area (difference 8.36 -7.43;  $df=1/202$ ;  $F=6.434$ ;  $p=.01$ ). The total absence of boys in a few subcategories complicate generalizations further, but also for this gender the mean ratings are consistently high for productive experiences and consistently low or lower for receptive ones, and the means 8.22 and 7.20 for boys differ by more than one scale step on a clearly significant level ( $df=1/149$ ;  $F=7.608$ ;  $p=.01$ ). The difference of .85 between the total means 8.40 and 7.55 is also clear and highly significant ( $df=1/328$ ;  $F=15.065$ ;  $p=.001$ ). The pattern of consistent differences in

favour of productive experiences seems to be broken in the dance area, but here the negative difference might be seen as an accidental outcome, resulting from the fact that the "mean" for receptive experiences here happens to represent only one experience with a remarkably high rating (by a girl who had watched a ballet performance where her sister participated; note how exceptionally high this rating of 9.25 is in the column for girls' receptive experiences).

The more modest difference between boys' strength ratings in the music area could possibly deserve some attention (productive experiences 8.17, receptive 7.71; corresponding values for girls 8.79 and 7.84), while the drastic gender differences for the visual area (8.33-6.37=1.96 for boys, 7.65-7.50=.15 for girls) may mainly reflect the unreliability of means for very small groups. In the ANOVA analyses, no experience type x gender interactions approached significance. A very obvious gender-related result is girls' consistent tendency to give higher strength ratings (in a one-way ANOVA the general difference of 7.46 -8.08 for arts experiences between boys' and girls' means was highly significant, with  $df=1, 374; F=15,51; p=.001$ ; note the similar gender differences also for nature and non-aesthetic experiences). Regarding the productive experiences, the mean rating was 8.46 for the pupils with "private" experiences, and somewhat lower for the "collective" group (8.26).

## 4.2 Qualitative aspects of productive experiences

The productive experiences were examined for qualitative elements according to the principles suggested earlier (psychological-pedagogical relevance, some generalizability, etc), and with a primary focus on elements reflecting aspects of self-esteem.

### 4.2.1 Ego-enhancing elements in pupils' reports

In inspecting the participants' reports of productive experiences, most of the formulations which could be seen as reflecting or as being closely related to self-esteem expressed feelings and reactions as those suggested on p. 6 above, i.e., satisfaction with one's accomplishments or contentment with oneself upon certain attainments or successes. References to appreciation from other persons occurred quite often and were also considered relevant, because it is evident that directly perceived social approval may be a powerful contributor to self-esteem (MacDonald et al. 2003). It was found suitable to designate all such expressions in the reports as "ego-enhancing" elements, which could somewhat roughly be classified as follows:

a. Elements expressing *one's own positive evaluation* of some performance or creative work, ranging from mildly positive statements to more emphatic ones (e.g., "[the theatrical performance] went okay"; "I was very satisfied [with my short story]"; ". . when my band reaches perfection . . and my guitar sounds good like hell . ."). Here, formulations typically contained words such as "well", "fine", "good", "content/satisfied with . .", "error-free", "succeeded/successful".

b. Elements describing the satisfaction of having *made some definite progress or important developmental step*, or of having *reached some important goal* (e.g., finally succeeding in performing some intensely rehearsed music piece, experiencing "a sense of victory" after the successful completion of an ambitious theatrical project, "attaining a goal" after diligent work with a painting, suddenly finding out how to improvise when singing or playing the piano). A boy stating that "it is very nice to learn new pieces" was accepted as a relevant case, but otherwise only mentioning some new learning or having done something for the first time did not by itself qualify a pupil for this subcategory, if this was not also mentioned as a notable achievement in some respect.

c. Elements expressing *self-confidence/strengthened self-confidence, pride, self-esteem or sense of personal competency* accompanying some productive experience. Most of these reports contained the words "self-confidence" or "proud", other pupils used expressions like "hey, look, I'm good at something too!" [a "performing" dancer], or ". . so nice to see what you yourself have been able to create [when painting or writing]". Mere positive statements about one's performance or achievement as such were classified in category a, but were not considered relevant here if they were not also accompanied by any statements relating to self-appreciation or self-confidence.

d. Elements reflecting *appreciative reactions from others*. Here, most references were made to applause from an audience, and sometimes to positive reactions from a fellow performer, a teacher, critics or family members. Regarding a few borderline cases, a chorist's statement "we had the audience with us all the time" was considered relevant, but not formulations such as "the audience was fantastic", or "the audience shouted all the time", when these audience behaviours were not definitely related to the (rock music) performances in question.

On the whole, elements of the c-type could be considered to represent constituent elements of self-esteem, while the a- and b-elements reflect sense of competence and the d-elements perceived positive social approval,

i.e., factors which should be causally closely related to self-esteem. The four aspects of ego-enhancement are of course not exclusive, because a pupil's experience could easily comprise, e.g., pride (c) along with appreciation from others (d). Elements of the b-, c- or d-type were mostly accompanied also by some explicit positive comment on one's performance or creation as such, i.e., an element of type a.

Table 2. Frequencies of pupils reporting productive experiences containing "ego-enhancing" elements of different kinds.

Arts area	a positive evaluation		b progress, development ..		c self-confidence, pride ..		d appreciation from others		at least one of a-d		at least two of a-d	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
<b>Music</b>	33	15 45	10 30	6 18	9 27	24 72	12 36					
<b>Drama</b>	4	3 75	1 25	1 25	2 50	3 75	2 50					
<b>Literature</b>	3	1 33		1 33		1 33	1 33					
<b>Visual art</b>	8	4 50	1 12	2 25	2 25	4 50	4 50					
<b>Dance</b>	5	1 20		1 20	1 20	1 20	1 20					
<b>All areas</b>	53	24 45	12 23	11 21	14 26	33 62	20 38					

In table 2 and the following qualitative analyses, the area called "mixed/other" experiences in table 1, with only one productive experience, has been left out. Regarding the ego-enhancement aspect, it was considered most logical to include only the 5 "performing dancers" (cf. p. 8) in the dance area.

The penultimate column, based on an "at least one of"-criterion, contains high percentages especially for music and drama, and the last column indicates that in most areas about one third to one half of the participants describing productive experiences report even two or more ego-enhancing elements. Proportions calculated for the "small areas" with n-values between 3 and 8 should of course also here be interpreted with extreme caution, but the total pattern of percentages nevertheless indicates that elements of ego-enhancement may often be encountered also here.

Ten (71%) of the 14 d-type elements resulted from an audience's appreciative reactions on some musical, theatrical or dancing performance together with others; a cross-tabulation of d-type occurrence/nonoccurrence with the collective-private continuum yielded a significant phi-coefficient of .36 ( $p=.02$ ). Conversely, b- and c-elements were more frequent among the private experiences, which also had a certain preponderance of girls. In the private category the percentages of b- and c-elements were 35 and 30, respectively (absolute frequencies 7 and 6), with corresponding values of only 8% and 16% (2 and 4) for the group of collective experiences; a nearly significant phi-coefficient of .30 ( $p=.08$ ) was noted for the cross-tabulation of the collective-private variable with occurrence of b-elements. Thus, most of the c- and especially of b-elements were reported by pupils, largely female ones, who alone and in their private surroundings had felt the satisfaction of finally mastering some music piece, had discovered their ability to play or sing in some new ways, had been pleased by their own literary or visual art creations, or the like. The girls also outnumbered the boys in the "at least two" variable, where 25% of the boys and 45% of the girls were noted for two or more elements of ego-enhancement (phi=.21 with  $p=.12$  when gender was cross-tabulated with the dichotomy 0 or 1 element vs. 2 or more elements).

#### 4.2.2 Affective expressions, "therapeutic" elements

Even more numerous than the clearly *positive evaluative* reactions represented by the category a in table 2, were clearly *positive affective* expressions, conveying positive emotions and feelings with or without explicit connection to the evaluation of one's achievements. Thirty-eight pupils' (67%) reports of productive experiences contained such elements and no negative ones. Frequencies for different areas were: music 20 (61%), drama 4 (100%), literature 1 (33%), visual art 5 (72%), dance 8 (89%). Sometimes these positive feelings were described in more restrained manners (was funny . . . , felt good/fine when . . . , would like to make it again), but mostly stronger expressions were used, containing words such as "glad, happy/happiness, lovely, wonderful, such an enjoyment, exhilarated", and the like.

Reactions such as these are of course closely related to the mood-enhancing capacity of art experiences, and this is especially the case of many reactions which could also be roughly classed as being even "therapeutic". In 7 cases *positive changes of mood or state of mind* were reported, with descriptions of how some discomfort (tiredness, feeling down, lost self-confidence) was relieved by the experience in question.

Four pupils reported, without mentioning any specific initial troubles or worries, that some playing, dancing or painting activity made them "relax" or "forget everyday problems". Seven pupils mentioned some kind of *abreacting one's feelings*, a generally recognized way to restore mental balance. Terms such as "give vent to", "abreact", "pour out", or "act out" [ . . . my/one's feelings, thoughts, frustration . . . ] were used, or expressions directly referring to the activity itself ("dance off all my feelings", "write off everything"). Some such therapeutic element was reported by 17 pupils, i.e., 30 per cent of the total group. Corresponding values for the separate areas were the following: music 9 (27%), drama 2 (50%), literature 1 (33%), visual art 2 (25%), dance 3 (33%). Of the pupils reporting therapeutic experiences only 4 were boys in the music and "non-performing" dance area, while 12 were girls (i.e. 37.5% of the girls) who represented all the five experience areas. Regarding the first-mentioned type of therapeutic elements (changes of mood/state of mind), all relevant experiences concerned effects of private music-making at home, and all but one were reported by girls. Of the 17 pupils describing musical group activities only two ones were noted for therapeutic elements; the corresponding number among the "private" experiences in this area was 7 (50%) out of 14.

Reports containing at least one positive affective expression and no negative one were somewhat more numerous among the girls (74% vs. 63% for the boys), and the just-mentioned trends of the therapeutic elements to be more frequent among the girls and in private experiences were significant or practically significant in cross-tabulations separately with the private-collective classification ( $\phi=.35$ ,  $p=.03$ ) and with gender ( $\phi=.24$ ,  $p=.07$ ).

It may be noted that when positive expressions of both the evaluative (cf. the a-elements in table 2) and the affective kinds are considered together, 43 (75%) of the pupils were noted for one or more such positive expressions and no negative ones; the values within separate areas were: music 25 (76%), drama 4 (100%), literature 1 (33%), visual art 5 (62%), dance 8 (89%). Of the remaining 14 pupils, 5 described experiences which could be regarded as at least implicitly positive, containing ego-enhancement elements of type b-d or describing intense and probably gratifying experiences (mostly of the strangeness-extraordinariness type, cf. below), although explicit use of positive expressions of the above-mentioned kinds was not made; 2 other subjects described their experiences positively but with some reservation (the tedium of rehearsing music, frustration over a string breakage).

Emotions related to sadness or fear were expressed by a boy reporting tears and melancholic memories of his uncle when drawing a portrait, and by three girls experiencing their own written texts (song lyrics, short story, poems) as both fascinating and scaring, or as expressing sometimes happy and sometimes sad feelings. Only three pupils reported experiences which seemed to be wholly unpleasant: the just-mentioned boy as well as a boy and a girl who described annoying occasions of unsuccessful music-making or painting.

#### 4.2.3 Elements of flow-like involvement

Although there is of course no way of deciding unequivocally whether a reported experience in its totality should be classified as a flow experience, many reports clearly contained elements regarded as typical of such experiences. This pertained above all to the kind of spontaneous focused concentration or absorption stressed by Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi (1998, 32) as the "perhaps most universal" of all flow characteristics. Several pupils representing all areas described a state of "thinking of nothing else" . . . , forgetting "all other things around me", being "wholly intent upon . . ." or "wholly in my own/another world", or the like. If also three cases of the "I could have continued to [e.g., sing with my choir all the night]" - type are counted, such intense or prolonged absorption in some activity was clearly reflected in 16, or 28%, of the 57 productive experiences (for separate areas: music 6/18%, drama 1/25%, literature 2/67%, dance 5/56%, visual art 2/25%). Eight pupils expressed feelings of fluent or automatic effortless control when making music, acting or writing (e.g. ". . . could play the difficult piece correctly without thinking about it", "the performance went like clockwork", "it [melodies and lyrics] comes to me automatically, without thinking"), and 8 also described feelings of merging with some music ("flowing into . . .", being carried away by . . .), of losing the normal awareness of one's self or of the passing of time when playing, writing or drawing (" . . . as if you were not there yourself . . ."; " . . . as if someone other had written it"; "I was in a kind of coma [and] did not even notice that the lesson had finished" (regarding feelings of control as typical in flow experiences, as well as "merging" and loss of self-consciousness or awareness of time, cf. Csikszentmihalyi 1997, 112-113, 118-121; Csikszentmihalyi & Csikszentmihalyi 1998, 32-33). At least one flow element was mentioned in 8 boys' and 16 girls' reports, together 42% of the pupils; the frequencies for different areas were: music 13 (39%), drama 2 (50%), literature 2 (67%), visual art 2 (25%), dance 5 (56%). The (not significant) predominance of girls may partly be seen as an aspect of a certain predominance of private experiences (55% of these vs. 32% of group experiences contained flow elements), and of the fact that

one third of the reports containing these elements represented the most "female" areas, i.e., dance, drama and literature.

It also seems likely that at least the ego-enhancing elements b-c in table 2 (self-confidence/pride and sense of progress/development/attaining goal) very often imply a flow character of the experiences even if none of the above-mentioned elements are explicitly mentioned. This is because in these cases the pupils' capabilities typically have been stretched to match relatively demanding challenges, as, for example, when one finally discovers the art of improvising, succeeds in producing a painting meeting some satisfactory standards, etc. (regarding the role of the skill- challenge balance, cf. Csikszentmihalyi, e.g. 1997, ch. 2). If also these ego-enhancing elements were considered flow-related together with above-mentioned concentration/absorption, fluent control, etc., the percentage of pupils describing at least one flow-related element would rise to 63, with values for different areas ranging from 100 for literature to 50-62 for the other areas.

#### 4.2.4 Elements of strangeness, extraordinariness

Some reports, of which several also contained flow elements, attracted particular attention not so much for their frequency as for the way in which they reflected *feelings of unreality or strangeness* or described some *clearly extraordinary, exceptional* qualitative impressions or states of mind. The pupils in question expressly reported having felt something strange or unexplainable (disregarding occasional commonplace use of words such as "incredible/-ly"), and/or described ways of feeling or perceiving clearly out of the ordinary. Referring to the classification of music experiences by Gabrielsson & Lindström (2003, esp. pp. 174-175, 181-182), categories concerning "altered sense of consciousness" and "transcendence" seem especially relevant here (cf. also Appendix A in Gabrielsson 2008 and 2011). In fact, all of these experiences could be seen as transcendental in some sense, as lying well beyond the pupils' ordinary experiences of their inner or outer world, beyond their ordinary affective involvement in actions and events, beyond their ordinary capacities, etc. Some citations of key formulations in reports from the different areas may serve as illustrations:

- ". . . a wonderful feeling, just as if God had been so near . . . it felt very strange . . . I could have continued to sing all the night . . . this evening something entirely new had happened within me" [girl singing in a gospel choir],
- ". . . when we reach perfection and the energy grows to a maximum . . I feel kind of elevated above the environment and my guitar appears to weigh nothing and to sound good as hell . . ." [boy playing in a rock band],
- ". . I had to choose that topic! The world and my classmates around me just disappeared . . I sat in a tree by a seashore and saw the events of my composition as in a theatrical play . . was in a kind of coma . . ." [girl writing a school composition],
- ". . it may sound strange, but you cannot concentrate on those other things, you simply have to draw . . sometimes you don't know what you are drawing . . as if you were not there yourself. All thoughts vanish . . as if you were somewhere else." [boy describing irresistible bouts of drawing],
- ". . The feeling you get is absurd, as if you were hovering but yet pulled down, you think of nothing else, the head is all empty . . lose your grip on everything. You simply become "high", you are alone in the universe . . exhilarated but still empty . . as if you felt you were all and yet nothing. . [girl dancing at a disco].

Such elements of strangeness-extraordinariness were evident in the reports of 6 boys and 4 girls, representing 18 per cent of the pupils with productive experiences. The frequencies for separate areas were: music 6 (18%), drama 0, literature 2 (67%), visual art 1 (12%), dance 1 (11%). Half of these experiences were described by participants playing or singing together with others: 3 boys in rock bands and one male and one female choir member.

#### 4.2.5 Other qualitative characteristics

No other qualitative characteristics were noted, which would have been at the same time both frequent, generalizable over different areas, and of definite practical or theoretical interest. The 7 reports containing clear references to *social aspects* all considered music-making (feeling togetherness with other members of one's choir, enjoying playing with band members or a duet partner). Several pupils mentioned *initial nervousness* connected with some music (6 pupils), dramatic (3) or dance (2) performance before an audience.

### **4.3.1 Cases of mixed productive-receptive experiences, and "second" productive experiences**

Besides the "purely productive" experiences considered above, mixed experiences involving *both receptive and productive activities* were reported by 7 boys and 13 girls. Mostly the activities in each such experience concerned different areas, and in most cases music listening or nature had inspired the pupil to draw or paint. As an additional remark to the notable proportion in table 1 of productive experiences in the area of visual art (8/26=31%), it may be mentioned that as many as 8 of the mixed experiences contained painting or drawing as their productive activity. The mean of strength ratings for the mixed activity-experiences was 8.32, only slightly lower than the total mean of 8.40 for the productive experiences (cf table 1) and significantly higher than the value of 7.55 for receptive experiences ( $F=4.053$ ,  $df= 1/296$ ,  $p =.04$ ).

As mentioned earlier, the pupils describing more than one experience were few. Among those reporting also a *second experience*, this was a productive one for 4 boys and 3 girls and mostly considered the music area.

Also for these mixed and "second" experiences qualitative characteristics of the types mentioned earlier were noted. Four clear ego-enhancing reactions representing self-confidence/pride were noted regarding second experiences of music (3 pupils) and dance (one girl who wrote with particular assertiveness of how performing jazz dance made her feel "brave, self-confident . . . beautiful . . . capable of conquering the world"). A boy's second music experience and two girls' mixed experiences included therapeutic elements; one girl even stated that acquainting herself with a song and performing it "perhaps saved my life". Feelings of strangeness-extraordinariness were experienced by two painting girls, one of them inspired by nature (" . . I escape to another reality, the brush just flies . . ."), the other one by classical music (" . . very strange feeling . . my brain feels more clear . . sometimes I feel nearer to God"). As with the ordinary productive experiences, negative evaluative or affective reactions were rare. One girl complained about difficulties in perfecting a painting, and another one sometimes felt sad and sometimes happy when reading her own poems.

### **4.3.2 Activity-related pop/rock concert experiences**

The "activity-related" pop/rock concert experiences reported by 9 boys and 12 girls should be regarded as a particular type of receptive experiences and concern only the music area, but they may deserve some attention for their distinctive characteristics. These experiences tended to receive higher strength ratings than any of the earlier mentioned experience categories, with a mean rating as high as 8.88, which differed significantly from the mean of receptive music experiences ( $p = .001$  according to the Sheffé test for post-hoc comparisons after a one-way ANOVA showing a general .001 significance when these experiences were analyzed together with productive and ordinary receptive ones;  $df=2$ ,  $F=12.595$ ). The means of 8.94 for boys and 8.83 for girls also differed significantly from the means of ordinary receptive experiences for one's own gender. The qualitative aspects of the experiences were often rather situation-specific, as when a third of these pupils described the special feeling when seeing one's idols live, or 12 pupils (57%) mentioned overt behaviours such as dancing, jumping, shouting or singing. In almost half of the reports references were made to social elements, e.g., the collective character of the audience's behaviour and/or one's own participation in this (" . . to jump and shout together with the rest of the audience . . ."; "all seemed to know the pieces, and sung . . ."; "nice to feel that all seemed to be friends with each other . . ."). Seven pupils (33%) described the "atmosphere" (or general "feeling") of the event as happy or exciting, three ones used single expressions suggesting feelings of unreality (being "in another world"; . . in chock . . ."; "in trance . . ."), and in two cases some "therapeutic" effects were mentioned (bad mood dispelled, forgetting all problems). The general tone of all comments was, without exception, positive or enthusiastic.

## **4.4 Correlations between variables**

In order to provide some information on the relationships between variables for the pupils with productive experiences, correlations were studied between variables which were generally dummy-coded qualitative ones with values 1 or 0 for dichotomies such as gender or private vs. group experiences; for the qualitative aspects of participants' reactions the code 1 generally represented an "at least one"-occurrence of a certain element (e.g., at least one b-element of ego-enhancement, at least one flow element, at least one positive affective expression, etc.). Due to the marked negative skewness of the continuous strength rating variable, a matrix of rank correlations (Spearman's rho) was calculated. It should be noted that this method

only gives rather rough estimates of the correlations and that high and significant correlation coefficients can not generally be expected in a rather small sample with many variables showing uneven dichotomous splits and restricted variation.

Regarding individual-situational characteristics, some at least nearly significant correlations around .25-.40 reflected certain trends already mentioned, such as girls' greater tendency to report private experiences and therapeutic elements, and the tendency for private experiences to be positively related to occurrence of ego-enhancement b- and to therapeutic elements. Regarding correlations between qualitative characteristics of the experiences, occurrence of ego-enhancement elements a (positive evaluation) correlated .26 to .34 with occurrence of elements b, c and d, while the three last-mentioned elements had positive but low intercorrelations. Occurrence of some therapeutic element and some element of strangeness-extraordinariness correlated significantly (.30 and .35) with occurrence of flow elements. All ego-enhancement aspects and occurrence of therapeutic elements showed positive correlations with the occurrence of positive affective reactions; the coefficients were significant or nearly so for two ego-enhancement indicators, i.e., type c-elements (self-confidence, pride (.24, p=.07) and the "at least two elements"-variable (.26, p=.05).

Only three qualitative variables had correlations of at least about .15-.20 with strength ratings: ego-enhancement b (progress, development . . ) with a nearly significant coefficient of .24 (p=.07), flow elements with .19 (p=.14) and strangeness-extraordinariness with .15.

Although these data were neither very suitable for factor analysis, the principal components method was applied to the correlations of qualitative elements and strength ratings for the pupils with productive experiences. The first of three obliquely rotated factors contained high loadings (.63 to .70) for ego-enhancement type c (self-confidence, pride . . ), elements of positive affective reactions and therapeutic elements, and could thus generally be said to represent the degree of personal satisfaction with oneself and the state of things in the situation described. In the second factor the somewhat "extraordinary" reactions reflected by elements of strangeness-extraordinariness and of flow had loadings of .66 and .77, together with a loading of .53 for strength ratings. Strength ratings had a more moderate loading of .38 in the third factor, which was mainly represented by the four ego-enhancement variables (loadings .72, .65, .34, .56 for elements a-d).

#### **4.5 Productive arts-related leisure activities reported in the questionnaire**

The questionnaire completed at the beginning of each session provided data also about productive arts-related leisure activities. These could merit some attention here, because they may partly be seen as having a kind of background variable-relation to the pupils' significant experiences. Here, the summarized findings consider all pupils, not only those with arts experiences.

Half of the boys reported no such leisure activity at all in the questionnaire (51%), while not much less than half of the girls (45%) reported two or even more activities. Playing an instrument was a generally popular leisure pursuit, mentioned by 108 boys and 120 girls, almost a third of both genders. For all other activities there were drastic differences between boys and girls. The 58 (16%) boys painting or drawing may be noted, but among the girls as many as 130, 123 and 94 mentioned painting/drawing, singing or writing poetry, respectively (percentages: 34, 32, 24).

The relation of productive arts experiences to similar leisure activities was so close that it almost seemed that leisure activities in some arts area would be something like a prerequisite for significant productive experiences in that area. With the 4 "non-performing dancers" and one pupil who had not received the questionnaire excluded, only one pupil had described a productive (dance) experience without reporting leisure activity in the same area (but in the related areas of acting and singing).

The frequencies of leisure activities in each area always strikingly exceeded the numbers of productive significant experiences noted in table 1. There were, for example, 107 pupils writing prose or poetry (of whom the 94 poetry-writing girls constituted a clear majority), although very few of these reported productive experiences related to writing. The pupils with a certain type of leisure activity generally varied considerably regarding their significant experiences. Of those 154 participants who reported playing and/or singing and no other leisure activity, for example, many (55, i.e., 36%) described experiences in the music area (20 of which were productive ones), but the majority were distributed over all other areas, primarily drama and literature (16 and 12 pupils), the non-arts area of nature (27) and the not aesthetic-category (37). The general tendency to report productive arts experiences varied consistently with the number of productive arts-related leisure activities; the percentages of productive experiences for those reporting 0, 1, 2 and 3 such activities were 3, 25, 30 and 52, respectively.

## 4.6 School-related experiences

Six productive experiences in various areas were more or less directly connected with the school work or school environment. Two of the four drama experiences occurred in theatricals arranged by the school, and a girl's music experience resulted from intense rehearsing at home for a performance at a school concert. The exceptional experience of the girl writing her composition as "in a kind of coma" originated from a remarkably strong inspiration evoked by one of the topics suggested by the teacher. The productive experience most clearly integrated with ordinary instruction was that of a girl who described her satisfaction with a watercolour painting which she worked on during two successive art lessons, interacting with and getting approval from her teacher. An art lesson in school was also the context of the only "totally sad" productive experience, reported by the boy getting depressing associations when drawing a portrait.

Four other experiences took place in situations related to specially arranged music education: a boy's and a girl's group performances during a guitar playing and a choral singing course, and two boys' adjudications (regarding solo piano and ensemble rock playing) at a music institute.

## 4.7 Qualitative aspects of productive vs. receptive experiences

Here, the only thorough inspection of the receptive experiences was carried out regarding the occurrence of clearly *ego-enhancing elements*, which turned out to be very rare among the 299 pupils in question (with the activity-related pop/rock concert experiences excluded). Listening to black metal-music always made one girl feel extremely strong, "stronger than strongest . . . both physically and mentally", while certain pop/rock music sometimes gave one boy a sense of "being more violent and powerful than all others", and made another boy (esp. when the music was "quiet") feel "stronger, braver . . . self-confident" and occasionally "even angry". After watching the film *Fucking Åmål* a girl, apparently identifying with the main character, temporarily experienced herself as being more "funny, pretty, strong . . . and self-confident". Besides these 4 more evident cases, representing something similar to the c-type ego-enhancement of productive experiences, one could also mention a boy, who after a film "felt just strange . . . as if I were superior to all others but still a bit weak"; another film (*Dead poets society*) had strengthened a girl's wish to "try to be more independent and not care so much what others think".

Regarding the other specific qualities found in the productive experiences, only tentative comparisons were made, based on cursory perusals of the receptive experiences. These were sufficient, however, to demonstrate that for these qualities, contrarily to what was the case for the ego-enhancing aspects, it was easy to find the same or similar qualities among the receptive experiences. Also among these there were quite many formulations representing mood-enhancing effects including clearly "*therapeutic*" elements, as when some pupil used a drama video to "get a good cry" or found a pleasant painting "calming" or some music "relaxing" or "comforting" (most instances of clearly therapeutic effects apparently occurred when listening to music). Likewise, it was not hard to find receptive experiences containing elements of *strangeness-extraordinariness*, although the varied concrete manifestations of these sometimes made it difficult to judge offhand their exact comparability with the corresponding elements noted for the productive experiences. Some music listeners felt "enormous ecstasy and 100 percent intoxication", remained "staring, paralyzed", etc. A girl momentarily "entered into" the protagonist's role in a film she watched - certainly one of the most "magic" experiences in the whole study. Somewhat similarly, in the literature area several pupils had found themselves feeling as if they were personally participating in the story told in a book or as really "seeing" the course of events described, or had forgot everything around them or been unable to stop reading. Such cases of absorption in some listening, viewing and reading activity, often with forgetting of time and place, entering into another world or "merging" with a narrated story, obviously also often represent *flow elements* like those noted in productive experiences. *Social* aspects were sometimes mentioned in the receptive experiences, e.g. when describing how some music or a film was experienced jointly with friends or family members, but social elements of a clearly "collaborative" kind were not reported.

This research report has focused on certain ways in which productive arts experiences may positively contribute to young people's conception of themselves and their encounters with the arts. In concluding this results section, it could therefore be appropriate to mention that glancing through the receptive experiences also gave healthy reminders of the fact that productive experiences may be relatively lacking in some potentially enriching elements which are more common among receptive experiences. At least the following statements seem justified:

- *Associative reactions*, which link some art stimuli with specific memories, expectations or fantasies, were rarely mentioned in the productive experiences, but were easily found among the receptive ones, especially within the music area (e.g., when listening to some music gave rise to memories of an ex-

boyfriend, to anticipatory summer feelings, or visions of the endless space).

- Ego-enhancing elements in the productive experiences (especially of the type b-c; cf table 1) may often imply insights about one's own personal worth and abilities, but the receptive experiences provided numerous examples of more explicitly mentioned and much more varying *specific insights or knew knowledge*, sometimes also with an ensuing desire to know more or reflect further on some facts or events. The insights could consider one's own self, as when a song made a girl realize that she was not yet mature for any relationship with a boy, or when a film strengthened another girls' awareness of her tendency to meet other people with ungratefulness. Especially books, films or plays could cause "really opened my eyes"- or "really got me thinking about"- reactions regarding the most most diverse phenomena: God or life after death, the blessings of living in a welfare country, the Kennedy murder, the conflicts between whites and Indians, certain legal or social injustices or evils, etc.
- The receptive experiences obviously contained a *more varying range of feeling qualities*, and especially the balance between elements with a positive vs. negative emotional tone seemed to be quite different, compared with the productive experiences. It may be difficult to choose definitely adequate single key expressions for comparing the two types of experiences, but if only pupils' use of the Swedish words "glad-glädje" (i.e., glad-gladness, happy-happiness) is taken as a criterion, these were mentioned in 33% of the productive experiences (19/57) but only in 10% of the receptive ones (30/299). Sadness caused by some evoked memories or by the touching or tragic character of some music, song lyrics, film/play or literary work was quite frequently expressed in the receptive experiences. If crying (incl. "tears") is accepted as a criterion for identifying the most manifest cases, this was mentioned in 21 receptive experiences (7%) and in only 2 productive ones (3.4%; almost all "cryers" were girls, as were the majority of the pupils expressing sadness). Other not uncommon negative feelings in the receptive experiences were pity, indignation or outright anger, mostly when confronting filmic or literary descriptions of suffering, cruelty and injustice. No such emotions were reported in the productive experiences.
- As indicated by the nature of the main qualities of productive experiences, the descriptions of these mostly contain elements closely related to the productive activity itself and some accompanying or ensuing reactions of the participant. The reports of receptive experiences are much more often *focused on the very "art object" itself* (the music, film, literary text, etc.) Music or songs performed or created in productive experiences were rarely presented in any detail, commented on as such or even mentioned at all, while in receptive music experiences titles of pieces were often mentioned, sometimes with citations of lyrics or descriptions of some "intramusical" characteristics, and as a rule with some appreciative observation on their musical or lyrical qualities. Also among the pupils with productive experiences in the more pronouncedly narrative dramatic and literature areas, only one girl gave a somewhat closer presentation of some elements in her short story. On the contrary, most reports of receptive experiences in these areas revealed at least some elementary facts about what had been viewed or read, sometimes going into considerable detail when presenting characters, relating crucial elements of a storyline, or pointing out the perceived message and significance of some film, novel, or lyrics.

## 5. DISCUSSION

### 5.1 Main results: summary and comments

Receptive experiences clearly outnumbered productive ones in every arts area except the intrinsically very activity-related area of dance. Productive experiences were clearly most frequent in the music area, something which probably could be explained by certain conditions specifically related to musical activities; there is, e.g., a great many of young musicians who may serve as inspiring models or idols to imitate or as possible fellow musicians to join; moreover, the ready access to musical instruments and to one's own voice makes some decent playing and/or singing skills attainable for almost any well-motivated teenager, even with mainly private and informal practicing and performing (while e.g. acting in the drama area requires special agreements and arrangements). In some areas a scant supply of possibilities for receptive experiences among young people may contribute to a more even balance between modest numbers of productive and receptive experiences (cf. visual art) or, as in the dance area, even to a marked predominance of a modest number of productive experiences compared to very rare cases of receptive ones.

Regarding the relative strength of productive and receptive arts experiences, the pattern of results presented in table 1 strongly suggests the existence of a clear and generalizable tendency that the productive

experiences have been more strongly felt than the receptive ones. This could even be seen as a conclusion *a fortiori*, if one considers that clear differences and notable statistical significance levels should be less easily obtained here, due to reduced variation, often very small subgroups and a probably not very high reliability of the strength ratings. Here, many specific factors naturally complicate comparisons between different areas, but regarding music one could, for example, speculate that the enormous supply of music targeted at young people is so massive that it makes it easier also for the otherwise generally less "sensitive" boys to have strong listening experiences, something which could contribute to the smaller average strength differences between the receptive and productive music experiences for this gender group, and thus for the total group of pupils in the music area.

Since this has been only an ex post facto-study, the findings should not be taken to prove that the very "productiveness" of an arts activity exerts a simple and direct causal influence on the felt strength of the experience resulting from this activity. One may note, for example (cf. sect. 4.5), that the pupils reporting productive experience more often than others pursued such activities regularly, and it is of course possible that young people taking up artistic hobbies often are initially endowed with some tendency to respond more intensely to arts experiences. A reasonable causative mechanism could perhaps be some kind of "upward spiral" in which artistically responsive young people often establish hobbies involving productive artistic activities which, in turn, often provide especially favourable and recurrent opportunities for intense and rewarding experiences.

The strength ratings should reflect some general impact and "memorability" of the experiences, but since these ratings represent a somewhat unique feature of this study and seem to correlate clearly with the productive-receptive dichotomy, it would be interesting to know somewhat more about their nature, mainly regarding aspects of content and construct validity. In the correlative analyses, which give only rather crude information merely regarding the specific and rather homogeneous group reporting productive experiences (sect. 4.4), the strength ratings were not related to the occurrence of general positive evaluative or affective reactions, but showed some correlations with elements connected with feelings of progress-development (ego-enhancement b), of flow, and of strangeness-extraordinariness, i.e., elements which could somewhat roughly be said to represent something "beyond the ordinary". Such observations bring to mind Csikszentmihalyi's opinion (1991, 45-47) that genuine enjoyment involves something more than sheer pleasure, or the opinion of Seligman et al. (2005, cited by Lamont 2011, 230-231), that the pursuit of activities involving engagement and absorption, and relating to things beyond oneself, contribute more to life satisfaction than the pursuit of purely hedonistic enjoyment.

The qualitative characteristics of the productive experiences were mostly quite similar to those found by several researchers, mainly working in music psychology, music education and "flow psychology", who were cited in the background section and sometimes also in the results section when commenting on the selection of elements representing various qualitative aspects. For the ego-enhancement aspect primarily focused on, the striking scarcity of ego-enhancing elements among receptive experiences and the consistently notable percentages in the last columns of table 1 for every area, indeed suggest that for these young people feelings related to self-competency and self-esteem are clearly more easily evoked by productive experiences and accompany such experiences quite often. These results have obvious parallels to the findings in the author's earlier report and to some of Gabrielsson's observations on persons' strong music experiences during their teens. One may also refer to the stress laid by Elliott on self-esteem as a goal for music education (p. 3 above), and to the effects of flow states on self-esteem noted by Csikszentmihalyi (p.5).

It is of course not surprising that developing one's abilities and testing one's skills through overt activities in some specific arts area can readily provide possibilities of detecting concrete progresses and enjoying successful attainments, i.e. possibilities to experience feelings of self-efficacy or competency. The few expressions related to self-esteem in pupils' receptive experiences, typically involving feelings of being "strong", "brave" or "self-confident", obviously did not originate from competency feelings but rather from being influenced by certain features of the experienced object: from the mood expressed by some music or from identifying with fictive characters in some film. It should be pointed out, however, that all the ego-enhancement accompanying productive experiences need of course not result from a sense of competency; the jazz dancer feeling "proud, self-confident and capable of conquering the world" (p. 14), for example, may well have got these feelings not from experiencing competency but from the euphoria of the dancing activity itself.

When self-esteem is mentioned, for example, by Elliott as a goal for his "praxial" education, or by Csikszentmihalyi as a consequence of flow states, such authors certainly do not have in mind only some momentary feeling specific for the activity in question, but rather self-esteem as a more generalized component of a person's self-concept. Elliott speaks of developing "self-growth and self-esteem" (cf. p. 4), and this could perhaps be nicely exemplified by a boy in this study, who declared that he, after a successful

piano audition, "got much self-confidence and perhaps also grew as a person ("växte som människa"). It is of course impossible to base any general conclusions on the participants' reports, but it seems naturally highly probable that young people's accomplishments in areas and activities which they experience as important should often give them not only a narrowly situation- or activity-specific satisfaction, but contribute to a more global and lasting disposition of looking positively at themselves and their capacities.

In assessing the importance of the ego-enhancing aspects, and also of other qualitative aspects, it should be noted that the frequencies of relevant elements reported in this study may often have been underestimated, partly because of the conservative criteria for accepting formulations as being relevant, partly because of a data collection procedure that required the participants to carry out a somewhat unusual task in a rather short time. This resulted in reports, which probably often summarize only some of the most salient features of the experiences, described with only modest efforts to relate details and nuances. If, for example, pupils noted only for an a-element ("simple" positive evaluation) regarding ego-enhancement had been asked if they did not also experience some element of progress, development or pride (cf. elements b-c), it is probable that quite a few of them could have responded sincerely in the affirmative, although these elements happened to be left unexpressed at the moment of writing their reports..

Small frequencies make subgroup comparisons on qualitative characteristics very hazardous for the modest number of participants with productive experiences, although some reasonable conclusions may sometimes be at least tentatively drawn. It seems obvious, for example, that d-type elements of ego-enhancing (appreciation from others) should be more numerous in the group with "collective" experiences, which often involve an applauding audience. Concerning the differences between various experience areas, these are certainly often caused by random effects, but may certainly also indicate the play of conditions systematically influencing the occurrence of various elements. Such conditions might have to do, among other things, with the possibility of monitoring the quality of one's attainments according to certain criteria, with the chances to be rewarded by others' appreciation, and with whether the experiences in question involve performing or creative activities. Such factors could, for example, contribute to explain the partly somewhat particular results for the literature area. Here, objective criteria for a "right" or "good" performance are not very clear, and perhaps often experienced as rather unimportant by a young writer. Moreover, teenagers' literary products do not easily get others' appreciation through being shown like paintings/drawings or through some kind of performances, and teenagers may not even value writing talent as highly as, e.g., musical skills (the social importance of an activity may exert a significant influence upon how much a person's proficiency in that activity can contribute to his or her self-esteem; cf. the discussion of Harter 1985 esp. 67-68 regarding the conditions influencing the relation between "competence" and "self-worth"). A creative activity, perhaps especially private writing, may often also involve particular efforts to investigate and express the most varying inner thoughts and emotions, including delving also into less positive personal feelings. In the light of such considerations it is easier to realize the absence of ego-enhancement elements of the b- and d-type (cf. table 2) and the lower proportion of purely positive emotional reactions noted for this area, and the ambivalent positive-negative feelings reported by some "writers" (cf. p. 12, 13, 15).

On the whole, the most recurrently found subgroup differences in the data are gender differences. Girls generally pursue more artistic leisure activities of the productive type, report more productive experiences in nearly all areas and give higher strength ratings for their experiences (also for nature, receptive arts and non-aesthetic experiences). Regarding most of the qualitative aspects of the productive arts experiences (ego-enhancement, therapeutic aspects, etc.), girls' reports more often contain elements related to these. Boys' productive experiences are largely restricted to the music area and nearly half of them involve playing together with others in a pop/rock band. This last-mentioned activity is not reported by a single girl, and girls' experiences represent a wider variation of experience areas and types of activities, with a greater proportion of "private" activities and a perhaps more introspectively based sensitivity for one's own feelings of progress, "therapeutic" mental relief, etc.

Referring to Laiho-Saarikallio's categorization scheme mentioned earlier on p. 6, one could perhaps somewhat roughly say that productive arts experiences can give highly valuable specific contributions especially regarding some central elements of the "agency" category of psychological functions, while these experiences may not generally differ much from receptive experiences regarding their possible importance for the other categories concerning aspects of social, personal and emotional development. Many of the comparisons summarized in section 4.7 indicate that, despite the relative lack of ego-enhancing elements, receptive experiences may indeed comprise a wider range of feelings and reactions, involving many elements which are clearly less frequent or even rare in productive experiences, i.e., associations, insights, negatively toned emotions etc. Regarding their general emotional qualities, productive experiences could more frequently be seen as involving straightforwardly happy or enjoyable feelings which not, as is more often the case with receptive experiences, are alloyed by notable streaks of, e.g., sadness, melancholy or indignation, or

by emotionally more neutral reactions of getting new knowledge or understanding. All this could partly be because the receptive mode of responding may frequently direct more attention to an art object in its entirety and with all its details, while the productive experiences often restrict the attention somewhat narrowly to the very action of performing or creating and the circumstances most closely connected with this. In fact, productive experiences may often be "production experiences" rather than arts experiences in a very strict sense (cf. also Gabrielsson's observation mentioned earlier on p. 5, that music performers' strong experiences to a large extent focus on the performance itself and aspects of the performance situation).

It should also be noted that the drama and literature areas have here been proportionally more well-represented among the receptive experiences, which thus more often imply reading books or viewing films and plays, i.e., confronting engaging narrative material rich in content, and this could well enhance the possibilities of getting various associations, various insights, experiencing various feelings also of sadness, compassion, indignation, etc. Generally, the suggested differences between productive and receptive experiences may be decisively dependent on experience areas. The tendency of productive experiences to be "happier" could, for example, hold less well for the literature area, where teenagers' own writing of poems or stories perhaps often awake ambivalent feelings of both happiness and sadness (cf. the comments regarding writing vs. other productive activities above ).

## 5.2 Some implications for education and cultural work

Considering the general strength and ego-enhancing capacities and the often highly gratifying character of productive experiences reported by the participants, it might be tempting to conclude that arts education should focus primarily upon fostering productive activities. It must be noted, however, at least 1) that the trends noted above are only average trends and that it is easy - quantitatively, in fact much easier - to find significant experiences resulting also from receptive activities (and the top ratings given by the activity-related pop/rock concert attenders, albeit representing a quite special type of receptive experiences, should not be forgotten), 2) that, for reasons suggested above, the results of this study permit no definite conclusions regarding the causal effects of the productive vs. receptive nature of arts activities, 3) that regarding certain important qualitative aspects, receptive activities may often enrich arts experiences more than productive ones, and 4) that the memorable productive experiences reported here may not be highly representative of productive arts experiences in general - also the significant and gratifying productive experiences described in this study may often have been preceded and succeeded by numerous far less significant and pleasurable such experiences, and many persons, in fact, can easily recall occasions when productive arts activities under less favourable circumstances have turned out to be unsatisfactory, disappointing or even stressing (forced singing in front of one's class may serve as a simple but well-known example).

Nevertheless, the results strongly point to the potential value of productive experiences. Encouraging productive arts activities may of course be societally important by contributing to a flourishing professional and amateur culture, but the findings reported above indicate especially how efforts to develop and maintain performing and creative artistic interests and pursuits may enrich the experiences of single individuals. The practical measures to awaken and keep up an interest in such activities may vary considerably depending on the artistic area and on the social context with its particular educational agents, but some principles should evidently always be observed. The most important of these may be applying learner-centered approaches and recognizing the crucial role of motivation, mainly by taking the learner's own interests, initiatives and judgements into consideration. These things may almost take care of themselves when people privately engage in self-initiated arts activities (e.g. the "home art" of school pupils, cf. Taylor 1992, 9-10), and need not present notable problems in informal or semi-formal settings, as when parents encourage their children's creative activities at home, when teachers or artists lead extracurricular school-activities, or when cultural workers carry out arts-related community projects with voluntary participants. The motivational aspects can, however, be more easily neglected in formal educational contexts, where teacher- and curriculum-centered modes of instructing and evaluating often prevail. Modern authors in arts education typically stress the importance of allowing learners, also in formal schooling, to work with material that they like and themes that interest them, and of involving them as active participants in forming learning processes and assessing learning progress (e.g., Hargreaves e.a. 1989 regarding arts education generally; Lehmann e.a. 2007, esp. ch. 3, regarding music; Taylor 1992, esp. 10-12, regarding visual arts; and many of the contributors to the two volumes on arts education research edited by Bresler (2007; considering productive activities, see, e.g., the articles by Murphy and by Wiggins regarding music, by Woodson and by McKean regarding drama and theatre, by Hall e.a. and McCarthey regarding English, by Thompson regarding visual arts, by Hagood & Kahlich and by Anttila regarding dance).

The close relationship observed between productive experiences and corresponding leisure activities

suggested that the significant experiences in an area occurred principally among those who frequently engaged in activities in that area. This points to the desirability of not only awakening persons' interest in productive arts activities, but also of helping them to keep their interest up and eventually develop it as a regular hobby.

Another generally important pedagogical principle, especially relevant in a research context involving experiences, is simply that arts education should really pay attention to learners' personal experiences (which does of course not necessarily imply that particularly strong experiences would be expected to occur particularly often in educational contexts). Very generally, learner-centered approaches of the type suggested above should also be expected to provide opportunities for satisfying experiences and to invite learners to attend to their own feelings and reactions. Also here, the risks of ignoring this principle are probably greatest in formal education, especially when it comes to instruction in productive activities which require clearly definable and observable technical skills, such as performing music; probably not without reason Csikszentmihalyi (1991, 112) states that too much emphasis is often placed on the music performance as such, rather than on the performer's experience.

Regarding specific learning aids, one should note the new digital techniques which have continued to develop since the data of this study were collected. Computer programs for sound manipulation and music composition, for example, may greatly stimulate and facilitate the production and realization of musical ideas (Nilsson & Folkestad 2005). Likewise, applying digital techniques for reproducing and creating images and graphics may now be valuable complements to traditional drawing and painting. According to an Ofsted report (2005/08, esp. p. 30) computer-based methods could encourage particularly the boys' productive activities in the visual area. Such gender-related observations are important, because the results presented above both regarding significant experiences and leisure activities indicate that a most important educational challenge would really be to broaden especially the boys' spectrum of productive arts activities and their responsiveness to both productive and receptive activities (incidentally, this Ofsted report also suggested that visual art education in British schools often leaves much to be desired as it comes to applying learner-centered approaches).

According to this study, productive experiences differ clearly from receptive ones by being, on the average, stronger and more ego-enhancing. Qualities related to self-esteem are valuable both intrinsically and for their positive relations with other indicators of mental health (cf. sect. 2.4) and, although the intercorrelations between variables as calculated in sect. 4.4 can not give very convincing evidence, it is highly reasonable that the ego-enhancing aspects contribute both to the felt strength of the productive experiences and to the positive affective reactions accompanying them. This is a reminder of the possibility that measures conducive to self-esteem may be taken to enhance not only performing or creating, but also *receptive* activities. It may be impossible to get an audience's applause for any kind of activity, but if a listening, watching or reading assignment can be presented as an interesting and important task with certain meaningful and definable goals to be achieved regarding knew understanding or appreciative skills, the learner's successful work also with such a receptive arts activity may be experienced and evaluated as a laudable "attainment", enhancing the learner's self-confidence and sense of capacity, as well as the strength and enjoyableness of the experience.

The receptive significant experiences seemed to be more many-faceted in several respects than the productive ones, but this observation should of course not discourage educators from promoting productive arts activities. Rather, it should draw attention both to the educative potentialities also of receptive experiences, and to the possibility of broadening productive activities in certain directions. That, for example, more new knowledge and insights and a wider variation of feelings seemed to have resulted from the receptive experiences, indicates how activities such as reading certain texts and watching certain films or plays may be excellent and sometimes perhaps uniquely efficient ways of acquainting young people with historical and contemporary phenomena, problems of social life, important values, etc., but it should be clear that similar themes may well be treated also in productive work in different areas of art, perhaps especially in areas such as literature and drama.

### **5.3 Some implications for further research**

Further research on significant (or "strong") productive arts experiences should involve larger samples of experiences in areas only scarcely represented in this study, and examining experiences in several areas in the same research context would provide the best opportunities to make conclusions about the generalizability vs. area-specificness of the results.

The study of different populations would also be important, since both the strength and quality of productive experiences may vary for different groups of people. Older and more experienced persons with

well-developed artistic skills, for example, have fewer occasions to notice developmental steps and may be more blasé about others' appreciating reactions, and their productive experiences may thus differ from those of younger people regarding both general impact and qualitative elements. For teenagers, however, the productive-receptive dichotomy of arts experiences seems to be a very important one to investigate, and should be given continued attention also in further work with the data of the current project.

Concerning measurement methods, this study calls attention to the problems with qualitative variables based only on freely written reports. Especially if participants, moreover, are not always very capable of, or highly motivated to, verbalize their experiences, completing interviews or structured questionnaires may be well suited as methodological complements. It would be of interest to develop reliable and valid ways to quantitatively assess the impact of arts experiences (closer analyses also of the receptive experiences in this study may shed more light on the nature of the "strength ratings" here used). Probably, one should look for more than only one type of assessment continuum, at least perhaps one dimension representing something like "strength-general impact" and another one representing something like "pleasantness-liking-satisfaction", dimensions closely parallel to the classical potency- and evaluation factors typically found when analyzing data collected with semantic differential techniques (Snider & Osgood 1969).

Research on educational applications involving productive arts activities need of course not be modeled on studies on strong experiences, although some kind of subjective strength ratings may often be useful in assessing learners' responses to different methods. One of the most central pedagogical issues to be studied is probably how to make attempts at productive arts activities rewarding also for learners at low or modest levels of skill or motivation, so that their experiences could awake an interest and even a continuing engagement in productive arts activities or in arts generally.

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